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14. — *Cudjo's Cave*. By J. T. TROWBRIDGE, Author of "Neighbor Jackwood," "The Drummer-Boy," &c., &c.

WE have emerged from "Cudjo's Cave" with a feeling of relief. In these sanguinary times, when we cannot take up a newspaper but our eyes light upon the details of some battle or murder, or of some calamity on land or sea, even a sensation story loses some of the relish with which it is wont to regale us in the piping times of peace. Our passion for the horrible is not so intense but that the facts of "our own correspondent," as they are meted out to us from day to day with no unsparring hand, completely satisfies it; they so far exceed the fictitious horrors of the novelist, that the latter fail to provoke a shudder or a tear.

"Cudjo's Cave" is a sensation story, and, what is more and worse, a sensation story of to-day. Had the author laid his plot some three or four centuries back, when he could have clothed his hero in steel, caged the heroine in a stone fortress, and set his men to fighting with lance and axe, the plan, though common enough, would have better served the occasion, for the contrast with modern ways of life might have awakened at least a feeble interest. But the story of *to-day* will not greatly excite the imagination, when the recollections of Chattanooga are fresh in mind, and when the booming of cannon at Charleston disturbs our reflections upon the most frightful of imaginary encounters, though its effect be heightened by every flourish of art. When reality gets so much the better of fiction, we must be excused if we turn away from the imaginary sufferings of a Miss Virginia Villars, or from the imaginary heroism of a Mr. Penn Hapgood, to bestow our pity or admiration upon heroism and suffering which exist elsewhere than in the fertile brain of a professional book-maker. But, aside from any such consideration as this, we think the author has made a mistake in the choice of his subject.

The materials for a story which turns upon negro character have been exhausted by his predecessors in the field of novel-writing. Mrs. Stowe has left very little for her imitators. The drollery, the simplicity, the overflow of spirits, the ardent temperament of the negro, are apparent enough, but they will be appropriated by the first writer, and every succeeding one must copy. Besides, nothing can be more difficult than for a novelist in this day not to overdo this matter. Feelings run so high, both for and against the claims of the negro to a higher social position than he has yet occupied, that a writer can hardly help sacrificing his literary art to his prepossessions. Culture must do for the negro what it has done for other races, — develop his character.

The novelist must, meanwhile, be content to depict negro character as it is, rather than as he thinks it will be or ought to be. His labor will then be a legitimate one, but his field of labor will be very circumscribed.

Mr. Trowbridge has evidently spent most time upon his personations of the negro character, and taken most pride in them, yet they are the feeblest he has drawn. The exaggerated virtues which Pomp parades, as some rustic lieutenant his first set of brass buttons, the ape-like instincts of Cudjo, or the mawkish simplicity of Old Toby, entitle them to no place among characters that can bear criticism. We cannot discuss their merits or faults minutely, because they will not bear dissection; they are untrue to nature, and more than that we need not say. "Cudjo's Cave" has had a great sale, but its success can be easily accounted for on other grounds than those of merit. It is happily adapted to the excitement of the hour, and is entertaining from the rapidity of its incident and the animation of its style. But the last thing for which we should congratulate an author now-a-days would be the sale of his book; indeed, this is almost a matter for suspicion, for worthless books are greedily devoured.

The plot of this story is very simple; indeed, the story might have been compressed into the columns of a weekly newspaper without much detriment to its merits. Penn Hapgood, its chief figure, and by birth a Pennsylvania Quaker, is discharging the humble duties of a school-master somewhere in Tennessee, just before the commencement of the present war. Though a quiet non-resistant, and in all respects a very worthy person, Penn is suspected by those whose bread he eats of being an Abolitionist, and, without much ado, is tarred and feathered by some "poor whites." Silas Ropes, whose manners and grammar are equally bad, is the principal among his persecutors, and a fair representative, we presume, at least in the estimation of the author, of the "Southern chivalry." Upon intimation that less gentle treatment awaits him in the future, Penn hies away to the mountains, where he is met and succored by two runaway negroes, Pomp and Cudjo, whose grievances are as substantial as his own. Cudjo is the sole proprietor of a cave, which affords them concealment and shelter, besides furnishing the author with a name for his story. Here they are soon joined by others, whom love for the Union has compelled to leave their homes. The locality of the cave, which had long been a secret with Pomp and Cudjo, quickly becomes known after the number of its inmates is increased, and its gloomy recesses are soon the theatre of strife and bloodshed. Penn Hapgood, it is a comfort to say, finds that non-resistance, however good in theory, will not do in practice; he and his friends

defend their cave against the attacks of their foes with proper spirit. Ropes and his gang are repulsed, and before they can collect their strength again the defenders of the cave have time to retreat. The most prominent of them seek the Union army, where they have performed and doubtless are performing prodigies of valor. Hapgood becomes the famous "fighting Quaker," of whom we have all heard.

Such is the story, stripped of its details, and we cannot wonder that the characters which it has suggested to Mr. Trowbridge are not strikingly original or attractive. We ought to make an exception in favor of Karl, who is the one really good character of the book. Despite the gibberish which he is made to talk, because his father was a Dutchman, and his wondrous exploits, which would have been hard for a big man to do, he is quite a success. The cunning and fidelity of the lad are really boyish and entertaining. Neither is Mrs. Salina Sprowl without interest for us. She acts like a woman, a strong-hearted, weak-minded woman, throughout. The conflict which agitates her breast between passion and sense of duty, in which the last, though so often defeated, never quite loses its hold upon her, is very well drawn indeed. Her love for a worthless husband, to which she sacrifices her pride and her honor, we appreciate as true to life. That passage of the book in which she is represented as ready to burn the house over her head, in order to save a faithful slave from the violence of her brutal husband, is almost a stroke of art. Were we to treat "Cudjo's Cave" as destined to be a permanent addition to our literature, and not as a waif thrown out upon the stream to catch for a moment the breath of popular applause, and then to disappear, we should surprise the author himself. Even he could not have so intended it, or he would have given it a different name. Pomp, Cudjo, Barber, Penn, are creations for our own time; they will not be highly esteemed by the next generation of readers.

A stern purpose induced the author, as he intimates, to write this work. This purpose, whether good or indifferent, is feebly executed. Most writers of a sensation story are not without some reward for their pains, besides what their ware may bring in the book-market. The production of their trifle will serve to amuse a leisure hour, or to beguile away the tedious monotony of life, if nothing more. But we pity the author who devotes himself to such a task, not to please others or himself, but as a matter of duty. His labor will be fruitless; the stubborn evils of life, as he will find, must be met, if they are to be overcome, by a more potent weapon than an unnatural fiction.